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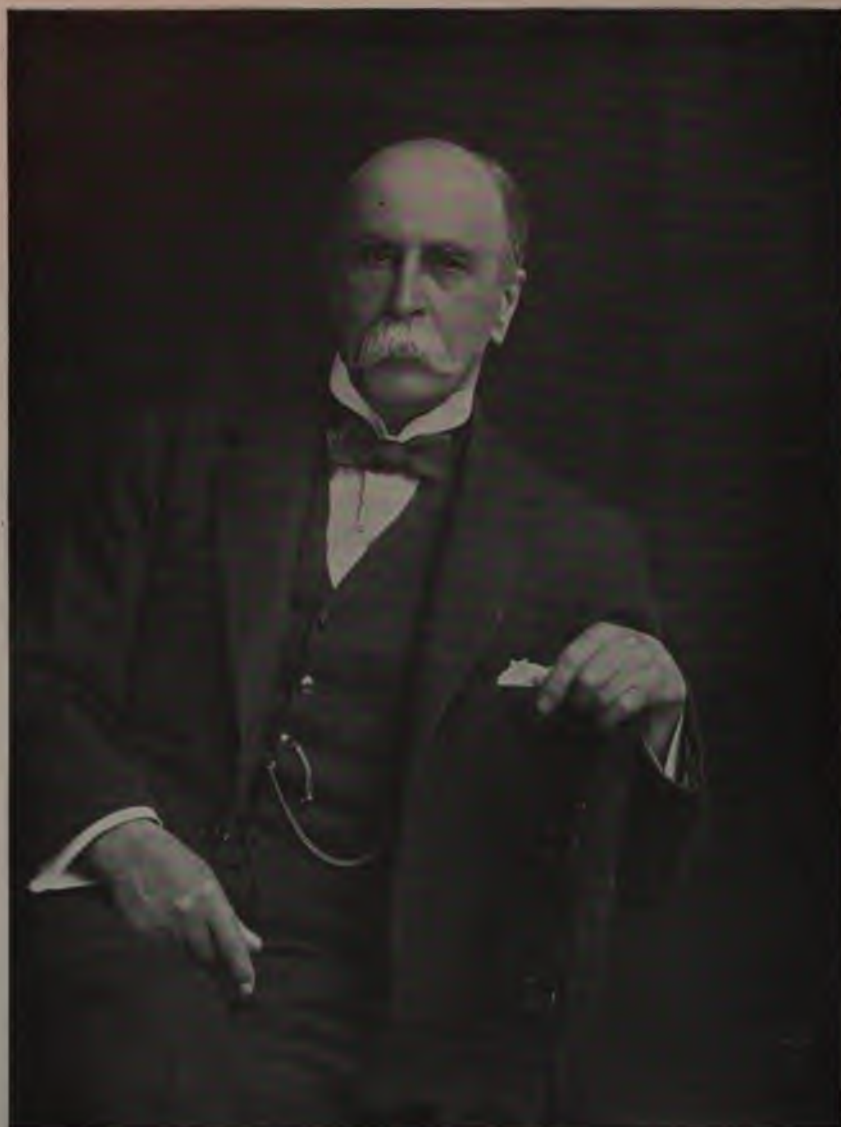
Sir William Osler, Bart.

In Memoriam

S. ADOLPHUS KNOFF, M.D.

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James E. Allen
H. Allen

1891

Sir William Osler, Bart.

In Memoriam*

By S. ADOLPHUS KNOPF, M.D.

Professor of Medicine, Department of Phthisio-therapy, at the New York Post-Graduate Medical School and Hospital

The first physician to receive the distinction of a unanimous election as Honorary Vice-President of the National Tuberculosis Association was Sir William Osler, a prime mover in its formation. His interest in the tuberculosis problem, in its medical as well as its social aspects, was unabated. He was closely identified with the antituberculosis movement in America and England, and his counsel was sought as an expert in all that pertains to this most widespread of diseases. The accompanying bibliography comprises some fifty of his most important contributions on the subject of tuberculosis. To Osler is due the formation of the Laennec Society for the study of tuberculosis which is a part of Johns Hopkins Medical School, and in 1900 he established the first social service division in connection with the tuberculosis work of the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

This universally beloved physician was justly claimed by three countries—Canada, the United States, and England. He was born in Tecumseh, Ontario, on July 12, 1849. He came from a family of culture, his father being the Rev. F. L. and his mother Ellen Frere (Pickton) Osler. Graduating from Trinity College, Toronto, in 1868, and taking his medical degree at the McGill University, Montreal, in 1872, he went abroad for a post-graduate course, studying at London, Berlin, and Vienna. On his return from abroad in 1874 he was made Professor of the Institutes of Medicine of McGill University where he remained until 1884, and then accepted a call as Professor of Clinical Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania. With the foundation of the Medical

* From the advance sheets of *The History of the National Tuberculosis Association*, by S. Adolphus Knopf. The frontispiece is the reproduction of a photograph Sir William kindly had taken shortly before his last illness, to enable the author to illustrate the biographical sketch of this great physician for the history. It is perhaps the best portrait of him in existence.

Department of Johns Hopkins University in 1889, Osler became Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine of that institution and at the same time Physician in Chief of Johns Hopkins Hospital, where he remained until the spring of 1905. In the fall of 1904 he had received and accepted a call from Oxford to become Regius Professor of Medicine. In reply to the author's congratulation on his receiving this great distinction, he wrote:

Naturally, I am very loath to leave America where I have been so well treated and where I have so many warm friends, but it really is an act of self-preservation. I could not possibly stand for very long the high pressure of my present life. The position is almost purely academic, and I will have an abundance of time for my literary work.

When Osler left America a dinner was given to him the memory of which will be forever cherished by those who were present. He was eulogized as a teacher, clinician, consultant and author by such men as Tyson, Shepard, Wilson, Welch, Jacobi, and Weir Mitchell. Osler's reply was full of expressions of gratitude and appreciation. Among other things he said,

Why so much happiness has come to me I know not. But this I know, that I have not deserved more than others, and yet a very rich abundance of it has been vouchsafed to me. I have been singularly happy in my friends, and for that I say "God be praised." I have had exceptional happiness in the profession of my choice, and I owe all of this to you. . . . I have been happy, too, in the public among whom I worked—happy in my own and in Canada, happy here among you in the country of my adoption.

His venerable mother and his wife were seated in one of the boxes, and turning a grateful glance upward, he said,

Of the greatest of all happiness I cannot speak—of my home. Many of you know it, and that is enough. . . . I have had three personal ideals. One, to do the day's work well and not to bother about to-morrow. The second ideal has been to act the Golden Rule, as far as in me lay, towards my professional brethren and towards the patients committed to my care. The third has been to cultivate such a measure of equanimity as would enable me to bear success with humility, the affection of my friends without pride, and to be ready when the day of sorrow and grief came to meet it with the courage befitting a man.

The honors bestowed upon Osler are almost too numerous to recount. He received the honorary degree of LL.D. from McGill University in

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1895, from the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh in 1898, from the University of Toronto in 1899, from Yale University in 1901, from Harvard University 1904, and from Johns Hopkins 1905. The degree of D. C. L. was conferred by Trinity University, Toronto, in 1902, and the University of Durham in 1913; the degree of Sc.D., from Oxford University in 1904, Liverpool University in 1910, and the University of Dublin in 1912. He was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1883, and a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1898. In 1911 Osler was created a Baronet of the United Kingdoms by King George V. In 1918 Sir William was made president of the British Classical Association, a rare honor indeed to be bestowed upon one whose training had been that of a physician purely and simply.

Osler's interest in America, in its medical institutions, and in his countless friends and pupils was genuine and lasting until the end. His work in Oxford equalled his achievements in Montreal, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. In answer to an inquiry of an article on "The Tuberculosis Problem After the World War," Sir William wrote me under date of May 26, 1919, "All goes well here and I hope we will get the tuberculosis problem settled ere long on national lines." During the war he worked for the health of the English and Allied Armies. The death of his only son, who lost his life in the world war, was a terrible blow to this great and good man, but he bore up under it bravely. In reply to a letter of condolence from the author, after expressing his thanks with his usual warmheartedness, Sir William merely added: "It has of course been a pretty hard business." Then forgetful of his own sorrow he went on to speak of our duties as physicians in the world war. He kept on working for the soldiers and with the soldiers. He talked to them on subjects of hygiene, how to preserve their health and how to prevent tuberculosis.

The July number of 1919 of the *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* was entirely devoted to tributes to Osler. Thomas, Barker, Councilman, MacCallum, Thayer, Brown, McCrae, Hamman, Fitcher, Jacobs, Brush, Woods, Chatard, Noyes, Hurd, Kelly, and Boggs, who had been either Osler's co-workers or pupils, related their personal experiences showing the wide spheres of his activities as a teacher, sanitarian, physician, citizen, scholar, and lover of books. The articles which are of particular interest to us as students of tuberculosis were those of Louis Hamman, who wrote on "Osler and the Tuberculosis Work of the Hospital," and of Henry Barton Jacobs, on "Osler as a Citizen and His Relation to the Tuberculosis Crusade in Maryland."

In November, 1919, Osler contracted pneumonia but he himself hoped for an early recovery, and on Christmas day he sent a typical cheerful telegram to Johns Hopkins Hospital, announcing that he was making a good fight. Four days later he died. Perhaps he only sent that message to give Christmas cheer to his many friends on this side of the Atlantic. He must have realized the seriousness of his condition, for after his death the following note, dated December 23, 1919, was found among his effects: "Dear friends, the harbor is nearly reached, after a splendid voyage with such companions all the way; and my boy waiting for me." How the soul of this great man is revealed in these simple words! Cheerfulness, an unbounded capacity for work, a devotion to the highest ideals of medicine and humanity, a marvelous scholarship, loyalty to his friends and kindness to the humblest of the humble, were the outstanding characteristics of Sir William Osler. His lifelong friend, Prof. William H. Welch, of Baltimore, well said of him, "To Osler nothing human was foreign. His home both in Baltimore and Oxford was a center of hospitality." Those who had the rare privilege to walk with Professor Osler through the medical wards who had the good fortune to have been present at some of his receptions to students, will never forget the human side of his character.

Osler's loyalty to his friends was indeed genuine, particularly when they were in need or in distress, as the author has reason to remember with undying gratitude. Osler was still smarting under the ignominious slander manufactured by a sensational news-seeking press which had taken seriously a jocular remark he had made on the subject of euthanasia when as a result of a statement I had occasion to make at a meeting of our National Tuberculosis Association I had to suffer a similar experience to that of the great Osler. During a discussion on the use of morphine in tuberculosis I ventured to say that in my opinion it was an almost indispensable remedy to assuage pain in the hopelessly ill consumptive. My statements were apparently approved by all present for it is well known that by the judicious administration of morphine we not only make the patient more comfortable but in reality prolong life. Yet, to the amazement of nearly everybody who heard me, among whom were the leading authorities on tuberculosis in this country, I was denounced the following morning in a Philadelphia paper as having openly favored the administration of enough morphine to hopelessly ill tuberculous patients to end their lives. As is usual with such sensational so-called news items, this statement quickly made the rounds of the American and European press.



William Osler
at the tomb of Louis, Mont Parnasse, October, 1905

On learning of this calumnious attack levelled against a younger colleague, Osler's indignation had no bounds. His own sufferings from a similar experience, he had borne with that equanimity of resignation characteristic of this great soul, but when it befell somebody else it was different. He urged me to start legal proceedings against that newspaper at once, offered me his private purse to defray expenses, and assured me the support of the American profession at large. He stood by me up to the end of a very hard but finally victorious battle defending me publicly and comforting me in private by touching letters of sympathy and friendship which helped me to bear up under a most trying and painful experience.

Osler was devoted to his pupils, but he was also devoted to his teachers and the veneration and enthusiasm he expressed when he spoke of his own masters and the masters of us all was an inspiration that not only stimulated the interest in historic medicine but aroused gratitude for the inheritance which the teachers of past generations have left us. On October 5, 1905, he took the American delegation, which had attended the Fifth International Tuberculosis Congress in Paris, to the cemetery of Mont Parnasse to deposit a wreath on the tomb of Louis, the French physician at whose feet so many American physicians of the past generation had sat. It was a touching tribute and gave the younger men a lesson in gratitude to our teachers. The accompanying picture of that occasion shows Osler in a thoughtful attitude after having made a short and impressive address to the American delegation.

Such a biographical sketch as this must necessarily be incomplete and inadequate to one of our greatest physicians of the Anglo-Saxon race of the present day, but we are considering mainly Osler's activities as an antituberculosis worker. As such he instructed thousands of students by word of mouth and by his writings on early diagnosis, practical prophylaxis, and rational treatment. In a lecture delivered soon after his arrival in England, he said: "Probably ninety per cent of mankind has latent tuberculosis, and if I had an instrument here with which I could look into the chest and abdomen of each of you I would probably find somewhere a small area of the disease. So wide-spread is the germ that practically all humans, by the time they become adults, harbor the bacillus of the disease. But we do not die, because we are not guinea-pigs and rabbits. We have attained a certain immunity. But the germ is in us, though negative, and with all of us there is the possibility of slipping into the dangerous state. But when workers have living wages,

when the house becomes the home, and the nation spends on food what it now spends on drink, then there will be millions instead of thousands with practically continuous immunity. For the enemy has been tracked to its stronghold, which is defended by three allies—poverty, bad housing and drink.” Regarding the social aspect he looked upon tuberculosis as a disease of the masses, and particularly of those of little or no means, and we know that he induced many of his wealthy friends and patients to consecrate some of their fortunes to the relief of the consumptive poor.

Characteristic of William Osler and his labors are the words which grace the photograph he presented to those who bade him farewell on May 2, 1905, when he was about to leave for Oxford. They were the immortal words of Abou ben Adhem, “Write me as one that loves his fellowman.”

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